



Allison Shelley/The Washington Times

Montgomery County Council member Phil Andrews watched as council member Roger Berliner rebuked Brad Botwin after Mr. Botwin spoke against a bill that would provide a contract for domestic workers in the county. The law would be the first of its kind in the nation if passed.

Bill seeks to aid domestic help

Montgomery County Council weighs measure

By Arlo Wagner
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The Montgomery County Council was scheduled to hear last night from residents about a proposal to improve working conditions for domestic workers.

The bill, if passed, would require employers to provide written contracts to employees working at least 20 hours a week that would define working conditions, hours and pay. Overtime pay would be 1.5 times the regular legal wage for 40 hours, and payments would be at least twice a month. Maryland's minimum hourly wage is \$6.15 an hour.

The domestic workers bill was proposed last month by

council members George L. Leventhal and Marc Elrich who call the proposal the first of its kind in the country.

They say many domestic workers, compared with employees in other jobs, work more hours, are paid less and are denied such benefits as vacation and sick pay.

One provision in the bill is that workers living in their employer's house must be provided with a private room for sleeping with a door that can be locked, with access to a kitchen, a bathroom and laundry facilities.

The bill is opposed by council member Duchy Trachtenberg, who called it "toothless."

She also said the bill would encourage investigations into

the immigration status of such employees, including many who are illegal immigrants, which would have a "chilling effect" on employment.

"We need more culturally appropriate services," said Mrs. Trachtenberg, arguing the reluctance of illegal female immigrants to report assaults and rapes suggests they also would unlikely report violations of the domestic workers law.

Last year, San Francisco passed a law helping domestic workers, which requires employers to provide sick leave.

The U.S. Census estimates there are 1.5 million domestic workers, including babysitters and housekeepers, in the United States.